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NIH-funded scientists engineered hybrid bird flu virus in Europe, tested in U.S.

10/11/2025 // Willow Tohi // **730** Views



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- The NIH funded the creation of a synthetic H5N1 hybrid virus using genetic material from multiple flu strains in European labs.

- The engineered virus was tested in ferrets in Alabama under live H5N1 challenge conditions.
- The project raises concerns about gain-of-function research and dual-use biosecurity risks.
- Private European biotech firms collaborated with U.S. agencies, signaling international coordination on pandemic preparedness.
- Critics warn of potential conflicts of interest, as NIH leaders stand to profit from future bird flu vaccine patents.



The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) has quietly funded the creation of a genetically engineered hybrid bird flu virus, assembled in European laboratories before being shipped to the U.S. for live-animal testing. The project, detailed in a recent peer-reviewed study, involved splicing genetic material from multiple influenza strains—including H1N1, H2N2 and influenza B—into a novel chimeric virus designed to evade immune defenses. The research, conducted under NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), raises urgent questions about oversight, transparency and the risks of taxpayer-funded gain-of-function experiments.

Who's behind the experiment?

The study acknowledges funding from NIAID, alongside private European biotech firms Treamid Therapeutics GmbH and UniFluVec. Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, executed the live ferret experiments under NIH supervision. Notably, NIAID leader Dr. Jeffery Taubenberger—famous for sequencing the deadly 1918 Spanish flu virus—holds patents for bird flu vaccines that could generate royalties in the event of a pandemic. Critics argue this creates a dangerous incentive: the same agency funding virus enhancement stands to profit from vaccines targeting it.

How the virus was built

The synthetic virus, dubbed UniFluVec, was constructed using reverse genetics—a method that reconstructs live viruses from cloned DNA. German firm GeneArt (a Thermo Fisher subsidiary) produced the synthetic plasmids, which were then assembled into a functional virus in Europe before transfer to U.S. labs. Researchers modified the virus further by splicing

in segments from H1N1, H2N2 and influenza B strains, effectively creating a never-before-seen pathogen with unknown transmission risks.

Live animal testing raises alarm

Ferrets were infected with the engineered virus and later exposed to a highly lethal H5N1 strain (A/Indonesia/5/2005) to test immune response. While framed as vaccine research, the study's methodology—combining synthetic virus construction, cross-continental collaboration and high-risk pathogen challenges—mirrors controversial gain-of-function experiments. Similar research in Wuhan was linked to the COVID-19 pandemic by U.S. intelligence agencies.

A pattern of risky research

This project is not isolated. The NIH, USDA and CDC have all funded programs to bioengineer avian influenza viruses with enhanced transmissibility and immune evasion. Meanwhile, HHS's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) recently awarded \$339 million to Cidara Therapeutics for influenza drug development. Critics warn that taxpayer-funded virus enhancement, coupled with lucrative vaccine contracts, creates a dangerous cycle: agencies manipulate pathogens under the guise of preparedness, then profit from the "solutions."

A repeat of COVID's origins?

The parallels to COVID-19 are striking. The U.S. government funded gain-of-function research in Wuhan, which multiple agencies now acknowledge likely sparked the pandemic. Yet, instead of halting such experiments, federal agencies are accelerating them—this time with bird flu. The lack of independent oversight and financial conflicts of interest fuel suspicions that pandemics are being engineered, not just anticipated.

Who stands to gain?

As NIH-backed scientists continue manipulating deadly viruses, the public remains largely unaware of the risks. The same agencies funding pathogen enhancement also control pandemic responses—and profit from vaccines. With H5N1 already circulating in livestock and wild birds, the consequences of a lab leak could be catastrophic. The question isn't if another pandemic will emerge, but whether it will be natural or man-made.

If history is any guide, the next pandemic may not come from nature—but from a lab funded by the very institutions tasked with protecting us.

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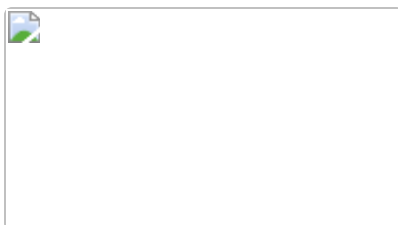
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